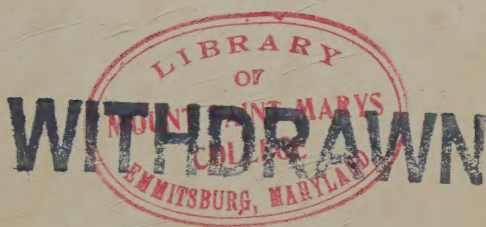


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GRACE AFTER MEAT

JOHN CROWE RANSOM



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JOHN CROWE RANSOM

With an Introduction by Robert Graves



Printed & published by Leonard & Virginia
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1924

To

ROBERT GRAVES

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INTRODUCTION

I have not met John Crowe Ransom and know very little about him beyond what his poems have told me; but I have gathered this much that he is a Southerner of Scots-Irish descent from Nashville, Tennessee, about thirty-two years old, the son of a local minister, that he saw trench-service as a lieutenant in the American Expeditionary Force, that he is now married, has children, and is settled as a professor of English at Vanderbilt University where with a group of younger writers he runs a notable magazine of poetry "The Fugitive." About two years ago I came across a copy of Ransom's only published volume "Poems about God" which had fallen completely flat in America, largely I believe because of its title. The literary editors had handed their review copies to the theological reviewers and the theological reviewers, perhaps slightly scandalized, at any rate found it a book impossible to praise in their columns.

Although Christopher Morley spoke a good word for Ransom in (I think) the *New York Evening Post*, that was all the benediction *Poems about God* won. I became so interested in the book that I began to ask whatever authorities on modern American poetry I met—T. S. Eliot, J. Gould Fletcher, Edward O'Brien, Professor Kroll of Princeton and others—about this most unusual writer. None of them knew anything about Ransom; Edward O'Brien wrote to his friend

Braithwaite an assiduous anthologist, but again no news.* It seemed then that the best thing to do was to publish a selection from *Poems about God* and from Ransom's later work, in England, hoping for the usual repercussion in America.

After some delays and disappointments a suitable publisher was found in *The Hogarth Press*, T. S. Eliot supporting my recommendations with his, and Ransom gave me permission to make whatever selection from his works I thought would most appeal to English readers. We have had a slight disagreement about the poem "Grace" which Ransom has grown out of liking on the grounds of its hastiness and ugliness, but which I find necessary for the appreciation of the poems of calmer scepticism that follow; moreover "Grace," with "Under the Locusts" and "The School," gives the local setting of poems with more general drift; however, Ransom has conceded me "Grace" and is otherwise sufficiently satisfied with my choice to reward me with the dedication.

The only other well known American poet with whom Ransom has the least discoverable affinity is Robert Frost. The difference between them is the wide

* More lately I met Mr. Louis Untermeyer who knew about Ransom and seemed to rate his work as highly as I did.

difference between New Hampshire and Tennessee, but common ground appears both in their manner and matter. In their manner, we find an extremely fastidious art disguised by colloquialisms and a pretence of "every-which-way" (to borrow Frost's own word). In their matter, we discover both poets acting spokesmen for those rebellious "poor whites" (in the political and plutocratic sense) who find the narrow puritanism of their fathers not enough for their needs, and turning sceptic, at first with violence, are beginning to adopt a new religion of nature-worship and toleration of their fellows. Neither Frost nor Ransom had any local poetic tradition on which to build and had each to evolve his own.

The history of Tennessee however has for the last seventy years been a more exciting and unhappy one than that of the mountain country to the North of Boston; Ransom gives us a glimpse of poor white agriculture and a hired-man problem not unlike Frost's, but we must remember that Nashville itself is a very progressive business town and that Vanderbilt is more than the usual provincial university. A gently ironic poem "The Southern Mansion" has just come to me from Ransom, too late to include in the body of this book, but excellent to quote some stanzas from here; it is post-European-War Tennessee looking at pre-Civil-War Tennessee. The stresses in this poem are characteristic of the latest phase of Ransom's art and right

enough, but they demand a watchful and sympathetic reader.

As an intruder I trudged with careful innocence
To mask decently a quite meddlesome stare,
Passing the old house often on its eminence,
Exhaling my foreign weed on its weighted air.

Here age seemed newly imaged for the historian
After his monstrous chateaux on the Loire ;—
A beauty not for depicting by old vulgarian
Reiterations which gentle readers abhor.

Each time of seeing I absorbed some other feature
Of a house whose legend could in no wise be brief
Nor ignoble. For it expired as sweetly as Nature,
With her tinge of oxidation on autumn leaf. . .

Stability was the character of its rectangle
Whose line was seen in part and guessed in part
Through trees. Decay was the note of old brick and
shingle.
Green blinds dragging frightened the watchful heart. . .

At last with my happier angel's own temerity
Did I clang their brazen knocker against the door
To beg their dole of a look, in simple charity,
Or crumbs of history dropping from their full store. . .

The old mistress was ill, and sent my dismissal
By one even more wrapped and lean and dark
Than that warped concierge and imperturbable vassal
Who bids you begone from her master's Gothic park.

Emphatically, the old house crumbled. The ruins
Would litter, as already the leaves, this petted sward,
And no annalist went in to the lord or the peons ;
The antiquary would gather the bits of shard.

But on retreating, I saw myself in the token
How loving from my Russian weed the feather curled
On the languid air ; and I went with courage shaken
To dip, alas, into some unseemlier world.

Ransom, then, is doing for his own state what Frost has done for New England, Vachel Lindsay for his Middle-West, and Carl Sandburg for Chicago. Such poets are the forerunners of a national American school that will one day produce a synthesis of all regional contributions, but for that school to appear will imply a more complete political synthesis than at present obtains between the States: we must be content to wait a long while for it.

ROBERT GRAVES.

ISLIP,
OXFORD.

Precociously knocked at antique doors ajar,
Fatuously touched the hems of the Hierophants,
Sick of my dissonance.

I went out to Bagley Wood, I climbed the hill;
Even the moon had slanted off in a twinkling,
I heard the sepulchral owl and a few bells tinkling,
There was no more villanous day to unfulfill,
The diuturnity was still.

Up from the darkest wood where Philomela sat
Her fairy numbers issued: what then ailed me?
My ears are called capacious but they failed me,
Her classics registered a little flat!
I rose, and venomously spat.

Philomela, Philomela, lover of song,
I have despaired of thee and am unworthy,
My scene is prose, this people and I are earthy;
Unto more beautiful, persistently more young
Thy fabulous provinces belong.

THE SCHOOL

I was not drowsy though the scholars droned.
Hearing the music that they made of Greek,
Whenever Helen's unforgotten face
Sent other young men whisking off to war;
Hearing much mention of the hecatombs,
And Pericles, and fishes that were purple,
Temples in white, and trees that they named olive;
And thinking always of proud Athens shining
Upon her hill, that slanted to her sea :

Equipped with Grecian thoughts, how could I live
Among my father's folk? My father's house
Was narrow and his fields were nauseous.
I kicked his clods for being common dirt,
Worthy a world which never could be Greek;
Cursed the paternity that planted me
One green leaf in a wilderness of autumn;
And wept, as fitting such a fruitful spirit
Sealed in a yellow tomb.

The Lord preserves his saints for Christian uses,
He sent a pair of providential eyes.
They would have sat in any witless head,
Although I deemed them deep as classic seas,
As strange as any woman written smiling,
And much more near; the merest modern eyes,

The first my Athens faced ; and yet her lamp,
It flickered rather low.

Then he commanded me to scrutiny
As to a fingered thing of no great matter,
A circumstantial sorry little coin.
A friendly thing, I owned, to lie so warm
Against the side of any friendless man ;
And in the hand—O if the happy hand
Accommodate the cunning rounded sceptre,
Then is dominion seated in that palm,
And coveting is seated in men's eyes.
Make haste, my hands about your own enclosures !
And what were dead Greek empires to me then ?
Dishonoured, by Apollo, and forgot.

GRACE

Who is it beams the merriest
At killing a man, the laughing one ?
You are the one I nominate,
God of the rivers of Babylon.

A hundred times I've taken the mules
And started early through the lane,
And come to the broken gate and looked,
And there my partner was again,
Sitting on top of a sorrel horse
And picking the burrs from its matted mane,
Saying he thought he'd help me work
That field of corn before the rain ;
And I never spoke of the dollar a day,
It's no use causing hired men pain,
But slipped it into his hand at dark
While he undid the coupling chain ;
And whistled a gospel tune, and knew
He'd join in strong on the refrain.

For I would pitch the treble high,
"Down at the cross where my Saviour died,"
And then he'd roll along the bass,
"There did I bury my sin and pride"

Sinful pride of a hired man !
Out of a hired woman born !

I'm thinking now how he was saved
One day while ploughing in the corn.
We ploughed that steamy morning through,
I with the mule whose side was torn,
And keeping an eye on the mule I saw
That the sun looked high and the man looked worn ;
I would take him home to dinner with me,
And there ! my father's dinner horn.

The sun blazed after dinner so
We sat a while by the maple trees,
Thinking of mother's pickles and pies
And smoking a friendly pipe at ease.
I broached a point of piety,
For pious men are quick to tease :
Was it really true John dipped his crowd
Down in the muddy Jordan's lees ?

And couldn't the Baptists backslide too
If only they went on Methodist spree's ?
And finally back to the field we went,
The corn was well above my knees,
The weeds were more than ankle high,
And dangerous customers were these.
I hoped we'd get a bit of breeze
And thought the hired man was used
To God's most blazing cruelties.

Sundays, the hired man would pray
To live in the sunshine of his face ;
Now here was answer come complete,
Rather an overdose of grace !

He fell in the furrow, an honest place
And an easy place for a man to fall.
His horse went marching blindly on
In a beautiful dream of a great fat stall.
And God shone on in merry mood,
For it was a foolish kind of sprawl,
And I found a hulk of heaving meat
That wouldn't answer me at all,
And a fresh breeze made the young corn dance
To a bright green, glorious carnival.

And really is it not a gift
To smile and be divinely gay,
To rise above a circumstance
And smile distressing scenes away ?

But this was a thing that I had said,
I was so froward and untamed :
"I will not worship wickedness
Though it be God's—I am ashamed !
For all his mercies God be thanked
But for his tyrannies be blamed !
He shall not have my love alone,

With loathing too his name is named.”
I caught him up with all my strength
And with a silly stumbling tread
I dragged him over the soft brown dirt
And dumped him down beside the shed.

I thought of the prayers the fool had prayed
To his God, and I was seeing red,
When all of sudden he gave a heave
And then with shuddering—vomited!
And God, who had just received full thanks
For all his kindly daily bread,
Now called it back again—perhaps
To see that his birds of the air were fed.
Not mother’s dainty dinner now,
A rather horrible mess instead,
Yet all of it God required of him
Before the fool was duly dead.

Even of deaths there is a choice,
I’ve seen you give a good one, God,
But he in his vomit laid him down,
Denied the decency of blood.

If silence from the dead, I swore,
There shall be cursing from the quick!
But I began to vomit too,
Cursing and vomit ever so thick;

The dead lay down, and I did too,
Two ashy idiots: take your pick!
A little lower than angels he made us,
(Hear his excellent rhetoric),
A credit we were to him, half of us dead,
The other half of us lying sick.

The little clouds came Sunday-dressed
To do a holy reverence,
The young corn smelled its sweetest too,
And made him goodly frankincense,
The thrushes offered music up,
Chaired in the wood beyond the fence.

And while his praises filled the earth
A solitary crow sailed by,
And while the whole creation sang
He cawed—not knowing how to sigh.

BY THE RIVERSIDE

A great green spread of meadow land,
(Must rest his weight on an ample base),
A secret water moving on,
A clean blue air for his breathing-space,
A pair of willows bending down
In double witness to his grace,
And on the rock his sinner sprawls
And looks the Strong One face to face.

The sinner's mocking tongue is dry,
Wonder is on that mighty jeerer,
He loves, and he never loved before,
He wants the glowing sky no nearer
He likes the willows to be two,
He would not have the water clearer,
He thinks that God is perfect once:
Heaven, rejoice! a new God-fearer.

And now each quiet thing awakes
And dances madly, wavers, dips:
These are God's motions on the air,
His pulse for the sinner's finger-tips,
His arrows shot across the blue,
His love-words dropping from his lips,
And who ever heard such whisperings?
Who ever saw such fellowships?

RESURRECTION

Long, long before men die I sometimes read
On stoic backs as plain as graveyard stones,
Which stand awry, being old and crooked bones,
An epitaph of poor dead men indeed.

Ridden far down with burden and with age,
Deaf as the dead that all these years they've been,
They stop the headlong highway till they lean
Aside in honour of my equipage.

"My old defeated traveller," I say,
What pretty piece of hope then have you spun
That keeps you marching on? For I have none
That you will rise and righten any day;

"I have looked often and I have not found
Old men bowed low who ever rose up sound."

WINTER REMEMBERED

Two evils, monstrous either one apart,
Possessed me, and were long and loth at going :
A cry of Absence, Absence in the heart,
And in the wood the furious winter blowing.

My winter's leave was much too cold for smarting.
What bitter winds, and numbing snows and sorrows,
And wheezy pines, like old men undeparting,
To funeralize against all green young morrows !

Think not, when fire was bright upon my bricks,
And past the tight boards hardly a wind could enter,
I glowed like them the simple burning sticks,
Far from my cause, my proper heat and centre.

Better to walk forth in the murderous air
And wash my wound in the snows ; that would be
healing,
Because my heart would throb less painful there,
Being caked with cold and past the smart of feeling.

And where I went, the hugest winter blast
Would have this body bowed, these eyeballs stream-
ing,
And though I think this heart's blood froze not fast,
It ran too small to spare one drop for dreaming,

Dear love, these fingers that had known your touch
And tied our separate forces first together,
Were ten poor idiot fingers not worth much,
Ten frozen parsnips hanging in the weather!

UNDER THE LOCUSTS

What do the old men say,
Sitting out of the sun?
Many strange and common things,
And so would any one.

Locust trees are sweet in spring
For trees so old and tough ;
Locust trees give sorry shade,
Hardly good enough.

Dick's a sturdy little lad
Yonder throwing stones ;
Agues and rheumatic pains
Will fiddle on his bones.

Grinny Bob is out again,
Begging for a dime ;
Niggers haven't any souls,
Grinning all the time.

Jenny and Will go arm in arm,
He's a lucky fellow ;
Jenny's cheeks are pink as rose,
Her mother's cheeks are yellow.

War is on, the paper says,
Wounds and enemies :

Now young gallivanting bucks
Will know what trouble is.

Parson's coming up the hill,
Meaning mighty well;
Thinks he's preached the doubters down,
And why should old men tell?

THE CLOAK MODEL.

"My son," the stranger thus began
And drew me to the window side,
"These mannequins are lovely as
The Trojan beldame ever was,
But yet beware!" he cried.

A tidy citizen was he,
Though I am sure a daffy one.
"See this one pose and pout for me
And march around magnificently,
And I am touched, my son.

"Observe how ripe the lady's lips,
How Titianesque the mop of hair;
And where the great white shoulder dips
Beneath its gauzy half-eclipse,
You well may stare and stare.

"When I was young I said as you
Are saying in your sapphic youth,
That perfect lips conveyed a cue,
And bosom's rhythm said it too,
It signified her truth;

"Her broad brow meant intelligence
And something better than a bone,

Her body's curves were spirit's tents,
Her fresh young skin was innocence,
Instead of meat that shone.

“I urge the moralists to thresh
(Indeed the thing is very droll)
God's oldest joke, forever fresh:
The fact that in the finest flesh
There isn't any soul.”

WRESTLING

Came threshing-time, the height of all our seasons.
We kept the thresher thundering by daylight
And rested all the sweeter after dark
With telling of tales, and washing in the river.
And one there was, some twenty miles a stranger,
Who boasted that he was a mighty wrestler,
And had not met the valiant pair of shoulders
That he could not put down.

We had a champion there. He looked and listened,
He measured off his man, and made his mind up,
And thus he brought great honour to his county:
“My friend, I’ve heard you bragging, heard you bray-
ing,
And now I say for God’s sake come and wrestle.”
And thus appealed, the other came, for God’s sake,
And then they wrestled.

They sprang, they gripped, they strained and rocked
and twisted,
They pounded much good sod to dust and powder,
They ripped the garments off each other vainly
And showed us many naked bulging muscles,
And still were equal.

But while the tide of battle ran so equal,
I heard a sound, I took it for a voice,

I almost saw it spitting out a passage
Between the haggard jaws of my poor hero,
The voice as of a man almost despairing,
With one hope trying when all hopes had failed :
“By God, I’ll have you down in one more minute !”
And it was as he said, for in a minute
He had him down, by God.

THE LOVER

I sat in a friendly company
And wagged my wicked tongue so well,
My friends were listening close to hear
The wickedest tales that I could tell.
There is a fond fool waits, I said,
On every worthless damozel,
Who if he live as late as I
Shall wish her heartily in hell.

And when your name was spoken too,
I did not change, I did not start,
And when they only praised and loved,
I still could play my loathly part,
Cursing and lies upon my tongue
And songs and shouting in my heart.

But when you came and looked at me,
You tried my poor pretence too much.
O love, do you know the secret now
Of one who would not tell nor touch?
Must I confess before the pack
Of babblers, idiots, and such?

Do they not hear the burst of bells
Pealing at every step you take?
Are not their eyelids winking too,

Feeling your sudden brightness break?
O too much glory shut with us,
O walls too narrow and opaque!
O come into the night with me
And let me speak, for Jesus' sake!

NECROLOGICAL

The friar had said his paternosters duly,
And scourged his limbs, and afterward would have slept;
But with much riddling his head became unruly;
He arose, from the quiet monastery he crept.

Dawn lightened the place where the battle had been won,
The people were dead,—it is easy, he thought, to die,—
These dead remained, but the living all were gone,
Gone with the wailing trumps of victory.

The dead men wore no raiment against the air,
Bartholomew's men had spoiled them where they fell;
In defeat the heroes' bosoms were whitely bare,
The field was white like meads of asphodel.

Not all were white; some gory and fabulous
Whom the sword had pierced and then the grey wolf
eaten,
But the brother reasoned that heroes' flesh was thus,
Flesh fails, and the postured bones lie weatherbeaten.

The lords of chivalry were prone and shattered,
The gentle and the bodyguard of yeomen;
Bartholomew's stroke went home—but little it mattered,
Bartholomew went to be stricken of other foemen.

Beneath the ogive of the firmament
Was a dead warrior, clutching whose mighty knees
Was a leman, who by her flame had warmed his tent,
For him enduring all men's pleasantries.

Close by the sable stream that purged the plain
Lay the white stallion and his rider thrown;
The great beast had spilled there his little brain,
And the little groin of the knight was spilled by a stone.

The youth possessed him then of a crooked blade
Deep in the belly of a lugubrious wight,
He fingered it well, and found it cunningly made,
But strange apparatus was it for a Carmelite.

Then he sat upon a hill and hung his head,
Riddling, riddling, lost in a vast surmise,
So still that he likened himself unto those dead,
Whom the kites of heaven solicited with sweet cries.

ADVENTURE THIS SIDE OF PLURALISM

Angered with a braggart kind
Prescribing others to its yoke
And seeming jauntily designed,
I rent my smooth locks, and I spoke:

—Lordly, have ye intimations
Of more excellent pedigree,
That ye taint the other stations
With the limp of bastardy?

Can ye outscreech the pea-hen,
Or out-jump the spring-bok,
Or scare away the wind and rain
With Shibboleth or Fokmafok?

Rear ye prouder than a stallion,
Creep ye lower than a snail,
As ye tread your suave cotillion,
Satyrs in a swallowtail?

But likest brethren fall apart,
Who can tie the miscellany,
Plato, Scythian, dog, and wart?
One is One, but we are Many.

If from one God's primal loins
All the creatures came to be,

It surpasseth creature brains
To find this family such tree..

There was an ancient man withal,
Doctor of Genealogy,
With wisdom on his red eyeball,
Who heard and answered me ;

His daughters wedded with the plague,
His pigeons wiven of the fox,
All the jewels in his bag
Gone in shipwreck on the rocks ;

With none to mind or mourn,
He sat beneath his locust tree,
But he saw my visage torn
And lifted up his voice to me :

--Aforetime there was one God only,
Simplex was his name, none other.
Ah, but Simplicity was lonely,
Nothing saying Father.

Feudal heart without a fief,
Empty Emperor, Rex,
Jahveh, Allah, Indian Chief,
Pontiff, Mandarin, Multiplex.

Where were the singers of his state?
Who were the largess of his loins?
Unless he mightily begat
Other Gods, many sons.

The vague moon and the fierce sun,
Lampless in the deathly quiet,
Pricked his continence, waiting on
The loosing of his Fiat;

The fir-tree quivering in her vase,
And the hop-toad in his kettle,
And a lady's lovely face,
And the tight suited beetle.

Out of joy they took their form,
Joyous they came forth and sped,
Both the able-bellied worm
And immaculate biped.

They were patterned prettily,
And of love; and even so,
Their young mouths cried terribly,
Ego, Ego, Ego!

If he wrought them for obeisance,
Simplicissimus missed his mark,
Too promiscuous of his essence,
Obsolescent Hierarch.

For the Stark, Prime, Simple,
When he multiplied his One,
Shared the holies of his temple,
And conveyed his throne.

Some may have returned him praise,
I, who bended a good knee
As a novice in those days
To my mad aunt Piety.

Have you heard the Ave sung?
Here's the cuckoo, bull, and fife,
Lark's bill and Cicero's tongue,
Loud of lustihood and strife.

And his messengers the suns,
Perfect clerks and bibliophiles,
Are stubborn hot automatons,
Running out their rebel wills.

Phoebe vibrant in the tree,
Running water, April pigments,
Mirrors changing endlessly,
Are wholes and not fragments.

Man was the youngest child,
Knew the son then its own father?
It was thoroughly beguiled
Of its own image rather.

And the mere spied weed,
With its red heart true centred,
Is an ultimate indeed,
And a God, well accoutred.

Free Hearts and Free Lances,
Man and Beast and Thingdom,
The unnatural Princes
Have divided out his kingdom.

My son, the motley and the pied,
The swarming and oblivious brood,
Swimming now in fratricide,
These are brother-and-sisterhood

So tell those dignities respective,
Noses counted to four hundred,
Tribes and orators respective,
Whom they slay are kindred.

NIGHT VOICES

And Nicodemus came by night.

Upon a night of fog,
Unseen, they hoped, of all the synagogue,
Two pale high-fronted youths withdrew apart,
Upheaving each his bitterness of heart
In a dark duologue.

"I have the whole hearsay,
They titled thee a little God today.
But didst thou promise to annul the tomb,
Complaisant with that frightened breed to whom
Thou fellowest in clay?"

"I sped their tremulous hope
For pity of a darkened horoscope.
For thou art Nicodemus, and thy sect
Hath schooled them so funereal, O stiff-necked,
Ye stinted all their scope."

"Our order doth not use
To ease them with false tidings of good news.
Our fashion is a jealous elder God
Who tempereth sometimes the chastening rod,
But raiseth no dead Jews."

“Ye slay the cripples’ hope,
Who would but slough their warty envelope,
The meek laborious who would mirth and play,
The tight-lipped righteous travailing for that day
When rock-bound graves may ope.”

“Friend, these lies profit not
When carcases so visibly do rot.
As well run forth and cry there is no Rome,
Still would the legionaries scourge them home
Whom they had fain forgot.”

“Nay, this hope lasteth more,
And maketh the mortal mark bite not so sore.
Our Jewry is fanatic, and I said,
‘In three days must each tomb unclasp his dead!’
Nor heard such joy before.”

“Take heed, high-hearted youth!
For they will kill thee save thou speak them sooth,
And they will say attentive to thy grave,
‘The little carpenter’s promises were brave,
But carrion telleth truth.’”

“O dogma’d Pharisee,
The hope I startle flitteth wide of me;
Suppose in thy turn thou shouldst firmly swear
That I had cleft the tomb and breathed the air,
Would it not flutter free?”

As further on they walked,
Out of old passion in the heart they talked,
And when the grey morn glimmered overhead,
They found they trod the gardens of the dead,
And spectre-white they stalked.

IN PROCESS OF THE NUPTIALS OF THE DUKE

Reduce this lady unto marble quickly,
Ray her beauty on a glassy plate,
Rhyme her youth as fast as the granite;
Take her where she trembles, and do not wait.
For now in funeral white they lead her
And crown her queen of the House of No Love:
A dirge then for her beauty, Musicians!
Ye are harping the springe that catches the dove.

AT DAWN

If there was a broken whispering by night,
It was an image of the desperate heart,
But the white dawn assures them how to part,—
Stoics are born on the cold glitter of light
And with the morning star lovers take flight.
Say then your partings: and most dry should you drain
Your lips of their wine, your eyes of the frantic rain,
Till they are as the barren Cenobite.

And then? O dear Sir, stumbling down the street,
Continue, till you come to wars and wounds:
Beat the air, Madam, till your house-clock sounds;
And if no Lethe flows beneath your casement,
And when ten years have brought no full effacement,
Philosophy was wrong, and you may meet.

ARMAGEDDON

Antichrist, playing his lissome flute and merry
As was his wont, debouched upon the plain ;
Then came a swirl of dust, and Christ drew rein,
Brooding upon his frugal breviary.

Now which shall die, the roundel, rose, and hall,
Or else the tonsured beadsman's monkery ?
For Christ and Antichrist arm cap-à-pie,
The prospect charms the soul of the lean jackal.

But Antichrist got down from the Barbary beast
And doffed his plume in courteous prostration ;
Christ left his jennet's back in deprecation
And raised him, his own hand about his waist.

At first they fingered chivalry's quaint page,
Of precedence discoursing by the letter ;
The oratory of Antichrist was better,
He invested Christ with the elder lineage.

He set Christ on his own Mahomet's back,
Where Christ sat fortified up like Diomede ;
The cynical hairy jennet was his steed,
Inert, and most unusual for attack.

The lordings measured lances and stood still,
And each was loath to let the other's blood ;

Originally they were one brotherhood ;
And there stood the white pavilion on the hill.

Nor were they hacked and harried to their boot ;
Men die when wounds insufferable are got,
These plagued with immortality could not,
When grim Lord Ares trod them underfoot.

To the white pavilion went the heirarchs
If they might truce their honourable dispute ;
Firm was the Christian's chin and he was mute,
But Antichrist ejected small remarks.

Antichrist tendered a spray of rosemary
To serve his brother for a buttonhole ;
The Christ about his adversary's poll
Wrapped a dry palm inscribed Mount Calvary.

Christ wore a dusty cassock, and the knight
Did him the honours of his tiring-hall,
Whence Christ did not come forth too finical,
But his egregious beauty richly dight.

With feasting they concluded every day,
And when the other shaped his phrases thicker,
Christ, introducing water in the liquor,
Made wine of more ethereal bouquet.

At wassail Antichrist would pitch the strain
For unison of all the retinue ;
Christ beat the time and hummed a stave or two, .
But did not say the words, which were profane.

Perruquiers were privily presented,
Till knowing his need extreme and his heart pure,
Christ let them dress him his thick chevelure,
And soon his beard was glosed and sweetly scented.

And so the Wolf said brother to the Lamb,
The true Heir keeping with the rank Impostor,
The rubric and the holy paternoster
Were strangely jangled with the dithyramb.

It could not be ; there was a patriarch,
A godly liege of old malignant brood,
Who could not fathom the new brotherhood
Between the children of the light and dark.

He sought the ear of Christ on these mad things,
And in the white pavilion when he stood,
And saw them featured and dressed like twins at food,
He poured in the wrong ear his misgivings.

He was discomfited ; but Christ much more.
Christ shed unmannerly his devil's pelf,
Took ashes from the hearth and smeared himself,
Called for his smock and jennet as before.

His trump recalls his own to right opinions,
With scourge they mortify their carnal selves,
With stone they whet the axe-heads on the helms,
And seek the Prince Beelzebub and minions.

Christ and his myrmidons, Christ at the head,
Chanted of death and glory and no complaisance ;
Antichrist and the armies of malfeasance
Made songs of innocence and no bloodshed.

The immortal Adversary shook his head :
If now they fought too long, then he would famish ;
And if much blood was shed, why he was squeamish ;
“These Armageddons weary me much,” he said.

TWO SONNETS

I. YEA

It was beside the fire that I had lit,
Out of the rain that drummed upon my roof,
She leant against my bosom, fluttering it,
And stared beyond my world: far, far aloof.

And neither spake, and thus we might have sat
Till angry Gabriel trumpeted for change,
But she said: "Heart of stone, look not like that!
O unconcessive husband, you are strange."

For joy I could not answer, being taxed
By such a star, so distant in the sky,
With being cold; but how my poor heart waxed,
This chidden wonder of women, the huge I!

Then, like a god disdaining her no more,
I smiled, and drew her closer than before.

II. NAY

With such strong arms I shut my love about,
She rested there, which was to me a token,
This was a house she could not walk without,
Securely bricked, and never to be broken.

Alas, the tight imprisonment was vain,
Too physical and wide to catch a heart ;
When we had come most near, and scarce were twain,
Some soul was still unmet, and much apart.

My hope was sprung ; and most unperjured lips
That ever sweetly bargained love's exchange
Must lie ; and love be blacked with this eclipse,
That she and I could live and still be strange.

And as for death, whose stroke dissevers men,
What fool could hope for firm possession then !

JUDITH OF BETHULIA

Beautiful as the flying legend of some leopard,
She had not yet chosen her great captain or prince
Depositary to her flesh, and our defense ;
And a wandering beauty is a blade out of its scabbard.
You know how dangerous, gentlemen of threescore ?
May you know it yet ten more.

Nor by process of veiling she grew the less fabulous.
Grey or blue veils, we were desperate to study
The invincible emanations of her white body,
And the winds at her ordered raiment were ominous.
Might she walk in the market, sit in her council of
soldiers ?

Only of the extreme elders.

But a rare chance was the girl's then, when the Invader
Trumpeted from the south, and rumbled from the
north,
Beleaguered the city from four quarters of the earth,
Our soldiery too craven and sick to aid her.
Where were the arms could countervail his horde ?
Her beauty was the sword.

She sat with the elders, and proved on their bleared visage
How bright was the weapon unruined in her keeping,
While he lay surfeiting on their harvest heaping,

Wasting the husbandry of the rarest vintage,—
And dreaming of the broad-breasted dames for concu-
bine?

These floated on his wine.

He was lapped with bay-leaves, and grass and fumiter
weed,
And from under the wine-film encountered his mortal
vision.

For even within his tent she accomplished his derision;
She loosed one veil and another, standing unafraid
And he perished. Nor brushed her with even so much
as a daisy?

She found his destruction easy.

The heathen are all perished. The victory was furnished,
We smote them hiding in our vineyards, barns, annexes,
And now their white bones clutter the holes of foxes,
And the chieftain's head, with grinning sockets, and
varnished—

Is it hung on the sky with a hideous epitaphy?
No, the woman keeps the trophy.

May God send unto the virtuous lady her prince.
It is stated she went reluctant to that orgy,
Yet a madness fevers our young men, and not the clergy
Nor the elders have turned them unto modesty since.
Inflamed by the thought of her naked beauty with
desire?

Yes, and chilled with fear and despair.

MOONLIGHT

When only moonbeams lit the dusk,
The world was somewhat set to right,
For all the piteous twisted things
Had lost the crooked marks of spite
Which seared the eyeballs to behold,
As man to man, in broad daylight.

But we forget so soon the shame,
Conceiving sweetness where we can,
Heaven the citadel itself
Illumined on the lunar plan,
And I the chief of sinners ! I
The middlemost Victorian.

ILEX PRISCUS

He is a tower unleaning. But he may break,
If Heaven in a rage try him too windily;
And what uproar tall towers concumbent make;

More than a hundred years, more than a hundred feet
Of timeless trunk that is too vast to shake;
Only the temporal twigs are abashed on their seat,

And the frail leaves of a season, which are susceptible
Of the mad humours of wind, and turn and beat
Ecstatic round the stem to which they are captive.

But he casts the feeble generations of leaf,
And naked to the spleen of the cold skies eruptive
That howl on his defiant head in chief,

Bears out their frenzy to its period,
And hears in the spring, a little more rheumy and deaf,
After the tragedy, the lyric palinode . . .

Now a certain heart, too young, and mortally
Yoked with an unbeliever of bitter blood,
Observed, as an eminent witness of life, the tree.

And she exulted,—being given to crying,
“Heart, heart; love is so firm an entity,
It must not go the way of the hot rose dying”,—

For the venerable oak, delivered of his pangs,
Put forth his flames of green in profuse joying
And testified to her with innumerable tongues.

And who but she fetched me up to the steep place
Where the oak vaunted? A meadow of many songs
Had to be traversed; and a thick populace

Of daisies and yellow kinds; whereof she knew,
Who had sorely been instructed of much decease,
Better than brag in this distraught purlieu.

But above the little and their dusty tombs was he
Standing, sheer on his hill, soiled by few
Of the knobs and broken boughs of an old tree,

And she murmured, "He is established, you see,
forever."

But thinking that she had lied too piteously,
I knocked on his house loudly, a sorrowing lover,

And drew forth like a funeral a hollow tone.
"Largely, the old gentleman is"—I grieved—"cadaver.
Before our joy shall have lapsed, even, he is gone."

I knocked more sternly, and his dolorous cry
Boomed till its round reverberance had outdone
The singing of bees; or the coward birds that fly

Otherwhere with their songs when summer is sped,
And if they stayed, would perish miserably ;
Or the tears of a girl discovering her dread.

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Grace after meat.

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